



# *The Frontline Supervisor*

*Helping You Manage Your Company's  
Most Valuable Resource - Employees*

*May 2001*

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- ◆ After a supervisor referral, my employee came back from her EAP appointment saying that the EA professional thinks I was not acting properly as a supervisor. I feel undermined and upset at the EAP. How should I respond?

**Remain focused on your** employee's performance and what you will do if it does not improve. You should remember that EAPs do not interfere with management and administrative practices. This is part of EAP theory and all EAP policies support this principle. The EA profession would have a very short life span, indeed, if the opposite were true. Of course, this principle cannot preclude what the employee might tell you after an EAP appointment. The sole purpose of an EAP appointment is to help an employee with a personal problem that could be affecting job performance. Consulting with the EAP before making a referral, accepting the principle of non-interference, and being certain about your supervisory decisions will help you focus on managing your employee while helping you weigh the importance, or validity, of what your employee reports.

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- ◆ For several years, my church has given much support to a man who works for my company. I am not his supervisor, but should I still encourage him to call the EAP? Those of us in the church are not professional counselors; still, we doubt any more can be done for him.

**Despite exhaustive, charitable** attempts to assist this employee by your church ministry, the EAP may still be able to assist him in solving his primary problems. Without a professional, clinical assessment to supplement your efforts, your group may have focused on basic needs or issues that stem from larger health or psychiatric problems. If so, these problems may not yet be identified or diagnosed. For example, food, clothing, shelter, parenting problems, employment stability, and other needs could be associated with addictive disease. If so, virtually no signs or symptoms might be identified by your group. Although the tireless efforts naturally make you think you have tried everything, effective assessment and other help may be needed. Since your group has played such a supportive role, it may be advisable for any treatment professional to include you in a role that encourages and best supports the employee's independent, problem-free living.

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- ◆ My documentation of employee performance has been criticized for not being effective enough to support administrative actions I have proposed. What are some of the most common problems with supervisor documentation?

**The most common problems** with supervisor documentation include: 1) The documentation lacks specifics. Example: "The employee regularly has poor attendance." Better, "Eight days of work were missed between March 3<sup>rd</sup> and March 20<sup>th</sup>." 2) The documentation includes emotional, subjective, or distracting language. Example: "The employee can't be trusted, takes advantage of everyone, and thinks he's better than others, etc." Better: "The employee took five unauthorized breaks last week, which burdened coworkers and their work schedules, causing major disruptions." 3) The documentation discusses performance problems, but the employee has not been made aware of the specific events contained in the documentation.

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- ◆ I have a habit of firmly shaking my finger to make a point when I am angry or trying to be assertive in a conversation. I don't intend to be intimidating, so what is the problem with such a non-verbal gesture?

**Interpreting non-verbal** behavior or gestures is part of the human experience. When you wave or shake your finger at employees, they may interpret the gesture as intimidating. Although you may not intend to intimidate or frighten your employees, the effect of the behavior on the recipients is what counts. This is also an underlying principle in sexual harassment; the effect of the sexually related behavior on the recipient (the employee's perception) helps define whether it is harassment. Certainly employees may perceive your finger shaking differently. Some may find it mildly irritating, while others may freeze in their tracks as if scolded by a parent. If employees are complaining about this gesture, they are telling you what it means to them. Rather than getting your point, your employees may feel intimidated into accepting your point of view.

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- ◆ When verbally correcting employees, are there some techniques I can use to reduce the natural defensiveness employees feel so they will focus on improving their performance rather than on how upset they are with my feedback?

**You can conduct a corrective** interview that will help preserve your working relationship and assist your employee in becoming a better worker. Here are a few tips: 1) Do not underestimate the power and influence of what you say in a corrective interview. Approach the corrective interview as an opportunity to help, not "zap," your employee. 2) Be direct and get to the point quickly. Be clear on the performance issue of concern. Explain its undesirable impact and the changes you expect. 3) Check your emotions to help you avoid saying something that will diminish the goal of your meeting. This includes labeling your employee, using parent-like or condescending language, or using language that sounds loud and harsh. 4) Validate your employee's worth and contributions to the degree possible. Acknowledge the skills and abilities of your employee that are valued by the organization. This validation will not diminish the importance of the performance concerns; rather, it will empower your employee to change.

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**Notes:**

***This information is intended only for the employees of your company. Please do not post it on a website that is accessible by the general public or by your company's clients.***

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